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## THE NEW TESTAMENT IDEA OF THE FUTURE LIFE

### III. THE FUTURE LIFE IN THE TEACHING OF PAUL—*Continued*

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In view of certain opinions which had become prevalent in the church at Corinth, Paul felt himself compelled to speak fully and explicitly on the subject of the future life (I Cor., chap. 15; II Cor. 4:16—5:9). The precise nature of these erroneous opinions cannot be ascertained; but they can hardly have involved a positive denial of the existence after death. An attitude of this kind would have been utterly incompatible with any profession of Christian faith. We may conjecture, rather, that the criticisms were directed against the doctrine of the Resurrection, as it had been proclaimed by Paul, in accordance with the general teaching of the early church. The purpose of his argument is to defend this doctrine and to remove the difficulties which seemed to render it untenable. He is content merely to indicate, by way of preface, his grounds for the belief in immortality, and then proceeds to his main contention that the future life, like the present, will have a body as its organism.

It is not difficult to understand why this doctrine had been called in question by the rationalists at Corinth. To the Greek mind the idea of a bodily resurrection was little else than a contradiction in terms. It had been assumed by all the Greek thinkers that the material body was at best a prison, in which the soul found itself excluded from the true life and brought into subjection to the world of change. The separation of soul and body was the first condition of immortality; and their reunion could only mark a new commencement of the dreary journey through passion and decay to death. Paul himself had so far accepted the postulates of Greek thought that he seemed to allow no room for a resurrection. He saw in the flesh the stronghold of sin, the principle of corruption in our nature. The redemption as he

conceived it had for its object a deliverance from all earthly bondage that we might become heirs of eternal life. But while Paul availed himself of these ideas derived from Greek philosophy, his thought remained rooted in Judaism. As a Pharisee he had learned to identify the future life with the resurrection of the dead, and the two conceptions were still so closely interwoven in his mind that they could not be separated. Those doubts on the resurrection which had been reported to him from Corinth seemed to imply an unbelief as to the very fact of immortality.

In the doctrine which he had taken over from the Pharisaic schools, Paul was only confirmed by his new faith as a Christian. The gospel was founded for him in the historical fact that Christ had risen; and it was inevitable that all his thoughts about the future life should bear the impress of this fact. Christ had risen, the first-born of many brethren. As he had given us the pledge of immortality, so he had exemplified, in his own risen life, that new state of being to which we are destined. It is true that Paul's conception of the resurrection of Jesus appears to differ, in several essential respects, from that which is suggested by the parallel narratives in the gospels. He makes no mention of the empty tomb. He says nothing to indicate that the earthly body of Jesus was reanimated. He records the vision granted to himself on the road to Damascus as if it were similar in kind to the earlier visions. None the less, he is convinced that Jesus rose again in a form that could be visually apprehended. His purpose in enumerating the various appearances is to prove, not merely that the Lord still lives, but that he possesses a body which is capable of manifestation. With such a body the believer will be clothed hereafter. As we have borne the image of the first Adam we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man. Our vile body will be changed and made like unto his glorious body (Phil. 3:21).

In his answer to the Corinthians, then, Paul takes his stand on the fact that Christ has risen; and on the basis of this fact he proceeds to examine the doctrine of the Resurrection, and to show that it is reasonable and necessary. His opponents had taken for granted that the soul, when separated from the body by death, must henceforth exist independently. But Paul reminds them,

by an analogy from nature, that this cannot be assumed. The seed, when it dies and springs to life again, has indeed lost its original body; but only to replace it by another, more suitable to the new conditions of its growth. It may be admitted that our present earthly body cannot ally itself with an immortal life; Paul is as strongly convinced on this point as his Corinthian readers. But he tries to impress upon them that their idea of what constitutes a "body" is far too narrow and inadequate. As we look around us in the universe we find an infinite variety of existences, all of them endowed with their appropriate bodies, although these bodies are utterly different from each other. There are men and beasts and fishes and birds; while above the earth there are sun and moon and stars, which Paul conceives of, after the manner of antiquity, as animated beings with celestial bodies of light. In view of this endless diversity of possible organisms, may we not believe that the soul, when it is separated from the present body, is yet invested with another, which is adapted, like the new body of the seed, to the larger conditions of its risen life? The body in which it now exists is earthly and corruptible; but God is able to prepare for it a heavenly body, exempt from decay and death. At this stage, however, Paul is confronted with a difficulty which to the primitive Christian mind was more than fanciful. It might be conceded that the dead would receive a new and different body; but what of those who would survive until the Lord's coming? In their case, presumably, there would be no dissolution of the present body. They would simply pass over from the lower state into the higher without discarding the vesture of flesh and blood which they had worn on earth. But Paul declares that for them too there must be a resurrection into a new body. When the dead arise at the sound of the last trump the living also will undergo a mysterious change. This earthly body will pass away and give place to another, worthy of participating in the kingdom of God. In this transformation of man's whole being into something incorruptible and eternal, the redemption will be accomplished. Death will be swallowed up in victory.

The more perfect organism in which the new life will realize itself is described by Paul as a "spiritual body" (*σῶμα πνευματικόν*);

and as such is contrasted with the "natural body" (*σῶμα ψυχικόν*), which is laid in the grave. Behind this conception of the "spiritual body" lies that whole doctrine of the Spirit which occupies such a central place in Paul's theology. He maintained, as we have seen, that through faith in Christ a new supernatural power takes possession of the believer and becomes the principle of his being. He is henceforth a "new creation"—no longer carnal but spiritual. When he speaks, therefore, of a "spiritual body," Paul is thinking of some higher kind of organism which will be fully responsive to the new nature implanted in the believer. Inwardly he has become already a spiritual man, but so long as he remains on earth he is bound to the imperfect body. He groans in it, being burdened (II Cor. 5:4), for he is conscious of the many limitations which it imposes on the higher life within him. But in the future this spiritual life will be united with a spiritual body, adequate to its needs and corresponding with its true nature. Paul elsewhere describes this new organism as a "body of glory," implying that its substance will consist of a heavenly light. It will be similar to the body with which Christ rose from the grave and which had appeared to Paul himself as a great light, "above the brightness of the sun" (Acts 26:13). But perhaps we may read a still more definite meaning into the phrase a "spiritual body." To Paul's concrete mode of thinking the spirit was itself a real essence, a sort of ethereal substance; and he may have conceived the new body as in some manner composed of spirit. Thus it would not only correspond with the higher life, as its appropriate instrument, but would be nothing less than its manifestation in visible form. The "glory" of which the spiritual body consisted would be the direct emanation of the spirit.

Did Paul regard this new body, molded out of another and higher substance, as in any sense identical with the old? It has often been inferred from his analogy of the seed that he thought of the natural body as mysteriously blossoming out into something different yet the same. What was sown in dishonor and weakness is raised in glory—revealing the possibilities that lay hidden in the corruptible body of flesh. But it is easy to infer too much from Paul's analogy. We have no reason for supposing that he arrived,

by some intuition, at our modern idea of the development of seed from within itself according to natural law. What he emphasizes, rather, is the *difference* of the seed that dies in the earth and the beautiful plant which comes in place of it. In this miracle of nature he sees an immediate divine action. "God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed its own body" (I Cor. 15:38). Thus from his illustration of the seed he argues for the probability of an altogether new body, having nothing in common with that which decays and perishes. In his later passage on the subject of the resurrection (II Cor. 5:1 ff.), he seems to conceive of this new body as already existing in heaven, like a house built to receive the pilgrim, or a vesture waiting to be put on when the earthly garment has been destroyed. These expressions are plainly figurative, and ought not to be unduly pressed. The new body, if Paul's conception means anything, is inseparably bound up with the new life, and does not enfold it in some merely external fashion, like a house or a garment. But this much at least may be gathered from the images in question. They make it clear, and are intended to make it clear, that the body which will be ours in the heavenly world is entirely distinct from that which we have borne on earth. The old tabernacle is dissolved in order that we may inherit another, in which the fleshly element has no part. It is strange that Christian theology, almost from the beginning, has so persistently misunderstood the doctrine which Paul was at pains to set forth in the most explicit and emphatic terms. Apologists without number have argued for a literal resurrection. They have sought to demonstrate by subtle and far-fetched theories how the scattered atoms of human dust may again be brought together and reconstituted, so that the body may rise along with the soul. So far as Paul's doctrine is concerned this ingenuity is simply wasted; for his whole exposition, when we read it rightly, is a deliberate protest against the crude and material view of the resurrection. He insists that the body in which the believer will rise again is not the earthly body. This belongs, by its very nature, to the world of corruption, and even those who are alive at the Lord's coming must exchange it for another. The

new life must of necessity be clothed with a new body, different in kind from that which we possess on earth.

We are now in a position to discern the underlying motives of the Pauline doctrine. Historically considered, it was an attempt to combine the Jewish-apocalyptic view of the future life with that of Greek philosophy. To Paul the Hebrew, nurtured on the Old Testament and imbued with the Pharisaic tradition, there could be no true life, now or hereafter, apart from a body. From the fear of being left "naked"—a houseless, disembodied soul—he shrank with his whole being, as from the worst horror of death. But on the other hand, Paul was repelled by the materialism of the Jewish idea of the resurrection. He maintained, as a fundamental principle of his Christian thought, that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption" (I Cor. 15:50). Between the two contradictory views, however, there was a third, which seemed to satisfy alike the traditional and the speculative interest. The soul after death would be united with a body—but with a new and incorruptible body. For the spiritual life there would be a spiritual organism, harmonious with its own nature.

Yet we do little justice to Paul's conception when we thus explain it historically, as a compromise between two opposite schools of thought. When we examine more deeply we can see that he was guided to this compromise by a profound religious instinct. The idea of immortality as presented by the Greek thinkers was abstract and one-sided. It took account only of the reasoning principle which manifests itself in man, and had no security to offer for a personal existence after death. The Jewish conception, with all its apparent crudity, implied the assertion of a future life in which the individual would not be obliterated. Man was to rise again in his body; he was to enter the world to come as a separate existence, and so continue the life which had begun on earth. Paul was aware that this conception in its literal Jewish form was self-contradictory; but he sought to maintain the truth that lay at the heart of it. He declared that immortality could mean nothing unless the individual sur-

vived; and that there could be no separate life without a separate organism. The new body need not be identical with the old; indeed it must be wholly different before it can take its place in an incorruptible world. But the spiritual life requires a spiritual body, as the earthly life requires an earthly one. In this sense it is impossible to deny the far-reaching and permanent significance of the Pauline doctrine. All later investigation, whether philosophical or scientific, has only confirmed the Apostle's principle that soul and body make up a single life and depend on one another. Soul without body is even more unthinkable to our modern mind than it was to him. If the individual life is to maintain itself after death it must be invested with its own organism—different from that body which it now possesses, yet in some way analogous to it and replacing it. Paul's teaching on the resurrection is beset with many difficulties, and is entangled with ancient beliefs and speculations which have now in great measure lost their meaning. But the main conception which he seeks to emphasize can never be discarded from the Christian doctrine of immortality.

In his whole discussion of the future life Paul concerned himself solely with the destiny of believers. Various attempts have been made to discover a wider application in several of his arguments. It has been inferred, for instance, from the value he sets on the resurrection, that he thought of non-Christians as still surviving, but in a world of disembodied souls, like the Old Testament *Sheol*. There is no real evidence that Paul entertained such a view. If he followed out his own presupposition, logically and consistently, his only conclusion could be that the natural man ceased to exist after death. Those alone who are spiritual have the capacity for life hereafter; and in the case of non-Christians the fleshly nature has never been overcome and transformed by the working of the Spirit. But the truth appears to be that Paul made no endeavor to think out his principles in all their implications. In more than one passage where he has occasion to touch on the fate of the wicked, we find him simply reverting to the current apocalyptic ideas of judgment and retribution. Those who know not God "shall be punished with an everlasting destruction" (II Thess.



1:8). At the Lord's coming "everyone will receive the things done in his body according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). Apart from a few such references, in which he formally accepts the traditional belief, Paul refrains from all conjecture as to the lot of the wicked; and this attitude of reserve, we can hardly doubt, was deliberately chosen. He desired to lift the idea of the future life out of the region of theory and speculation. His readers were to fix their thoughts, not on the riddles, but on the great certainty that for them as Christians there was an inheritance in the world to come.

But while Paul troubled himself little about mere speculative questions, he was evidently perplexed by one difficulty which had an urgent bearing on the actual life of the church. According to the primitive Christian view the resurrection was to take place on that day in the near future when the Lord returned. A period would intervene during which the dead would be separated from their bodies and so wait on, in some temporary state of being, for their call to the new life. Throughout the discussion in I Cor., chap. 15, Paul seems to accept this popular view. He thinks of the dead as passing into a "sleep"—an intermediate condition of half-unconsciousness—out of which they will be awakened by the trumpets of the Parousia. Then they will arise and be clothed with their bodies of glory and ascend with Christ into the eternal life. In the later discussion, however (II Cor. 5:1-9), Paul apparently gives up this view. He there conceives of the future life as immediately following the present one, so that the believer need not apprehend any interval of "nakedness." The new tabernacle is already waiting to replace that which is dissolved. To be "absent from the body" is to be "present with the Lord." It has been supposed that after the time when the former epistle was written, Paul's thoughts on the resurrection had undergone a change. His conviction that he would himself live to share in the Parousia had grown less assured, and in his shrinking from the ghostly condition of "sleep" which now threatened him, he fell back on the hope that death itself would bring with it the new life.

But the passage contains nothing to indicate that Paul had

consciously changed his views. In any case, only a few months at most had elapsed since the writing of I Cor., and we can hardly believe that in that short time his outlook had become so entirely different. It is more reasonable to assume that in this point of his teaching, as in many others, he wavered between two opinions, or rather held them both, without attempting to reconcile them. On the one hand he acquiesced in the common belief of the early church that the resurrection would be delayed until the Parousia, and that meanwhile the dead would linger in some shadowy underworld. On the other hand he felt, with his deeper Christian instinct, that the life of faith was already the beginning of eternal life. Those who had once given themselves to the Lord could not be divided from him by any dark interval of waiting. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

We have here the ultimate ground on which Paul rests his hope of immortality. He presents the hope under various forms, and seeks to confirm it and make it more intelligible by means of arguments derived from many sources. But it was bound up, in the last resort, with his faith in Christ. He knew, as a fact of inward experience, that he had risen with Christ into a higher life, of such a nature that it could not be overcome by death. He was conscious, too, that by fellowship with Christ he had drawn near to God and belonged to him forever, so that he had nothing to fear from any change. "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8). This confidence is expressed in language of matchless power at the close of the eighth chapter of Romans. The apostle there dwells on Christ's love to him, as revealed in the Cross, and accepts it as his one assurance. "I am persuaded that neither death nor life . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." In these words which take us to the heart of Paul's personal religion, we can discern the central motive of his whole teaching on immortality.